

NEWS

Calendar for a New Age Celebrates Age-Old Farms

Last spring, Roger Lancaster of USDA's Employee Services and Recreation Association (ESRA) was in a pickle. The leading calendar company in the country had approached him with a proposal. WRE/AMI of North Carolina was producing year 2000 calendars for the White House, CIA, Archives, and Treasury (among others). Had USDA considered such a product? Lancaster was at a loss. How could he make it happen? And what would be a good theme for the project? Luckily, he stumbled onto the fledgling USDA Millennium Office, and an idea began to take shape.

Patricia Garamendi, FSA's Assistant Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, had just recently been designated the USDA coordinator for White House efforts to celebrate the millennium. A variety of agencies, from Forest Service to ARS, were hosting projects and events. FSA's activities had thus far focused on crafting ways to identify and honor America's many "century farms" — farms owned and operated continuously for at least 100 years by the same family line. Wouldn't it be fantastic, Garamendi thought, to produce a calendar with century farms as the theme?

Before you could say "LDP," the race was on. The hurry? As WRE pointed out in the initial meeting, "We want you to know, in all honesty, you're really behind timewise. For example, we started the White House calendar a year ago." Here it was, mid-August, and FSA hadn't even identified the first

candidate farm, much less taken a picture. Fortunately, FSA is a can-do organization. A letter was sent to every SED in the country requesting help. The task: "Please identify at least two of your state's best, most picturesque century farms, take some sample snapshots, and send them back to the Public Affairs Staff in Washington, D.C. PS: You have seven days."

Not only did the state and county offices come through, they did it with flying colors. Within days, Public Affairs employees had in their hands photos and copies of historic documents for over 200 farms around the country. "We received copies of homestead certificates signed by Chester Arthur and Benjamin Harrison," said Eric Parsons, Public Affairs Branch Chief. "One Virginia farm's land title was handwritten on a sheepskin!"

By the end of August, Public Affairs had narrowed the list to



The McDonald Ranch, Niarada, Mont.
In the 1880s, Angus McDonald, Jr. drained a swamp to build a one-room cabin on the Little Bitterroot River. Now his grandchildren and great-grandchildren live in the two-story ranch house he built in 1900. The family runs a sheep and cattle ranch and breeds thoroughbred racehorses.

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

Happy Holidays!

I want to extend my best wishes for a joy-filled and healthy holiday season to all FSA employees. This time of year is often one of reflection; and as you look back on the past year, you can be proud of the high level of dedication and professionalism you have demonstrated — even through times of long hours, overwork, and stress. Time and time again you were called upon to do more, and each time you came through — for me, for your neighbors and friends, and for everyone depending on American agriculture.

Revisiting the past year, I remember the great times, the successes and the accolades, as well as the low ebbs and disappointments. One of the greatest gifts of reflection is the opportunity to learn. Some lessons are painful, but, hopefully, we can learn from our past mistakes. It's one thing I try to remember when I make mistakes — that there's a lesson in there somewhere!

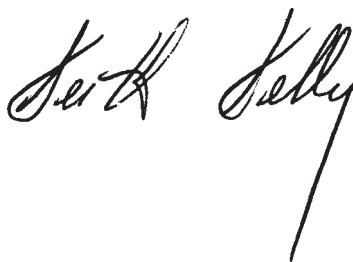
We may get distracted by the hype and commercialism of the holiday

season, but in the end, we recognize that the essence of the message is one of giving — to our families and to our communities. FSA employees are special. You give all year long. You give your precious time, your experience, and knowledge over and over again. I thank you for that.

To me, this season is also one of gratitude. I'm grateful for all of you and for your unwavering dedication to your jobs. You have important responsibilities — people count on you — and you're there when needed. I'm thankful, personally, for my health, my family, my hard-working staff, and so much more. You might just take a moment to think about what you're grateful for — we have so much.

This New Year is a special one for everyone as the 1900s come to a close. I look forward to the new millennium and see it filled with promise, hope, and excitement. The coming years will bring more challenges to us all, of that I have no doubt. And I have no doubt that we will meet each of them, as we have done so often in the past. We are determined to help the farmers and ranchers of this country, no matter how the economy goes, or the weather goes, or anything else that is thrown in our path. You know your jobs. You do them far better than just average. I know that will remain unchanged.

So, I wish you a bountiful and love-filled holiday season. And abundant thanks to you for your continued support and efforts throughout the year.



USDA's Mission Critical Systems Are Y2K Compliant

In October, USDA's Chief Information Officer Anne F. Thomson Reed announced that all 344 of USDA's mission-critical computer systems, including FSA's, are now Y2K compliant. The systems, which support some \$55 billion annually in USDA programs, have all been remediated, tested, and deployed.

"Achieving 100 percent compliance is an important victory for USDA agencies," Reed said. "All of the employees who have been working diligently on this issue should be proud of what they have accomplished. I want to thank each and every one of them for their efforts and encourage them to continue to work hard as we near the January 1, 2000 deadline."

Reed noted that achieving 100 percent compliance on the mission-critical systems that support USDA programs does not mean that USDA's year 2000 work is complete or that the agencies can now relax. "In the time we have left, we must focus on modifying and testing our contingency plans, continue to independently validate and verify our highest priority systems, and continue working with our state partners to ensure that these programs are not interrupted, even if Y2K glitches do occur," Reed said. "We have accomplished a lot, but there is still important work to be done."

For more information about Y2K readiness and personal preparedness, visit USDA's Y2K website (which links to the Food Supply Working Group website as well as FSA's Y2K website) at: <http://www.usda.gov>. Or go directly to FSA's Y2K website at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/time>

FSA NEWS

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CALENDAR

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18 farms (12 “best,” plus 6 “backups”), representing a broad range of commodities, regions, and ethnic groups. “We really wanted to capture the diversity of American agriculture,” said Tade Sullivan, Director of Legislative Liaison, Executive Secretariat, and Public Affairs Staff. At that point, the hard work fell to photographers from USDA’s Photo Services Division. The task was daunting: 6 photographers were to shoot 18 farms in 14 days, at locations from Oregon to Maine, California to Puerto Rico. “It was a small miracle, but we did it,” said Alice Welch of Photo Services. “We dodged a hurricane and the fires in California. It was close, *real* close.”

Upon receiving the photos, WRE quickly went to work, and within two weeks had produced a layout with the final 12 farms that, with minor adjustments, was perfect. Public Affairs employees, coordinated by Matt Kilbourne, interviewed the farm families for the biographical stories to accompany each month. “The



Shikuma Brothers, Inc. of Watsonville, Calif.
The Shikuma family has been growing berries, tomatoes, and other crops since Unosuke Shikuma left his native Japan for the fertile fields of California in the 1890s. The family began as sharecroppers, and in the 1930s, acquired the home/ranch they still own and manage.

photos are beautiful,” said Sullivan. “They really tell a story. And with the biographies, the project becomes quite powerful. It reminds us all about why we’re here and the importance of what we at FSA do. The farming families included in the calendar are an inspiration to everyone involved in agriculture. Despite going through tough times like the Dustbowl, they found ways to persist and thrive.”

Lancaster said, “The folks at WRE called me toward the end of the project. They expressed how moving and beautiful this calendar was to produce. Of all the calendars they’ve done, they said this is their favorite.”

The calendar is for sale through ESRA and can be ordered online. Everyone involved hopes it will be successful, so that it might develop into a yearly project. “One of the frustrations is that we were, naturally, limited to 12 farms,” said Sullivan. “With this calendar, we’ve featured 11 states and Puerto Rico. Eventually, it would be nice to see everyone represented!”

Idaho FSA Relays for Life

by Kaylyn Talbot, Outreach Coordinator, Idaho State Office

Susan Lowe’s ideas for outreach go far beyond the norm. Susan, a Program Technician in the Jerome County, Idaho FSA Office, was the brains behind an FSA team in last summer’s Relay for Life. This 18-hour relay benefits the American Cancer Society and was held at a local high school’s sports field.

FSA’s team included Susan, Sue Cenarrusa, Judy Bay, Becky Rios, Beth Jensen, Monta Green, June Lowe, myself, and 4 other friends. Each team camped out in highly decorated tents of different themes. The 1,050 relayers — including 200 cancer survivors — raised over

\$100,000 by taking turns walking laps throughout the night and into the next day. Our team raised a whopping \$2,240 — not bad for first timers.

As the event came to a close, Idaho Team FSA, though weary and a wee bit rummy, carried pride in our hearts. Will we do it again? In a heartbeat! My thanks to Susan Lowe for such a fulfilling experience!



Idaho Team FSA.

photo by Judy Bay

DID YOU KNOW?

The millennium officially starts on January 1, 2001 (there was no year 0). However, the start of the “Millennium Year” and all its celebrations begin January 1, 2000.

Budget Director Receives Highest Honor

David C. Hall, FSA's Budget Division Director, has received the Presidential Rank Award for Distinguished Service. This award, from the Office of the President, is the most prestigious honor a member of the Senior Executive Service (SES) can receive. In October, Administrator Kelly presented Hall with a certificate, signed by Secretary Glickman, during a ceremony in the Deputy Administrator for Management's office.

John Williams, Acting Deputy Administrator for Management, nominated Hall for his outstanding budgetary contributions in support of FSA and the Commodity Credit Corporation. "Dave's contributions to developing and justifying numerous budgets, even during times of employee downsizing and variable workloads, have enabled the timely delivery of program payments to over one million U.S. farmers."

Hall is exceptionally committed to his staff. "Over the past 15 years,"

Williams said, "Dave has been a tireless and dedicated manager, devoted to the professional development and recognition of his staff. He has strongly supported the principles of equal employment opportunity." Hall is also known throughout the Department for taking initiative and identifying critical programmatic and budgetary needs that should be addressed, regardless of formal lines of responsibility. And, his division is a leader in the use of state-of-the-art technology for budgetary applications.

At the award ceremony Hall noted that, "It's very special to be honored for my work on behalf of an agency I am so loyal to. I am extremely fortunate and grateful to be recognized." Hall, a California native, joined the former Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service in 1971 as a Grade 7 Budget Analyst. He worked his way up to Budget Director in 1983 and became a member of the SES in 1989.



Left to right: Administrator Kelly, Dave Hall, and John Williams.
photo by Jeff Kerby

"This honor is an appropriate capstone to Dave's stellar career in USDA," said Williams. "Everyone in FSA and especially those in the administrative management community can take pride in Dave's recognition."

Bioterrorism: An Agricultural Threat

by Michael Kaufman, Regional Public Affairs Specialist

In October, State Executive Directors from several Midwestern states and other State Emergency Board members met in Columbus, Ohio. The topic: bioterrorism. The use of biological agents to harm living things, including agricultural products, is a genuine possibility. As the potential impact of bioterrorism on public health could be devastating, the members came together to discuss preparedness for bioterrorism and other emergencies.

The board observed Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) operations in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and met with Fred Daley, Director, on the ODA's role in emergencies. The following morning, board members toured Ohio's state-of-the-art Emergency Operations Center (EOC), which serves as Ohio's command center during disasters.

At the center, experts ranging from a plant pathologist to an FBI agent to a veterinarian discussed the implications of bioterrorism on public health and the economy. These professionals work together to network emergency response efforts. Dr. Marcel Cassavant, Director of the Central Ohio Poison Center, explained that emergency plans are constantly being revised to respond quickly and effectively to biological threats. For instance, mock hazard drills are conducted to identify and implement disaster plan improvements in the availability of supplies, transportation needs, and security requirements at hospitals and emergency departments.

During disasters, Federal, state, and local agencies — including FSA — join forces at the EOC to coordinate an emergency response. This often



From the Ohio State Office left to right are: Todd Brace, Program Specialist; Don Grube, Program Specialist; and Rick Borland, Section Chief. They, along with Chris Piper (not pictured), organized the 2-day event.
photo by Michael Kaufman

includes calling upon field offices to collect data that will expedite the quickest relief to victims and help restore normalcy. Farmers are, of course, FSA's link to help during a crisis. Farmers are a dependable resource and often the first to volunteer during disasters — another example of the cooperation and generosity contributed by our Nation's farmers.

Produce for the People

by Frank Bender, State Outreach Coordinator and CED, Rensselaer County, N.Y.

In August, the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York presented its outstanding achievement award to Barber Farms of Fultonham, N.Y. for its support of the "Produce for the People" program. J. Roger Barber, one of the farm's owners, is FSA's New York State Committee Chairperson.

The Regional Food Bank is a nonprofit organization dedicated to alleviating hunger and preventing food waste. FSA works closely with the food bank by linking farmers who have surplus food with gleaning volunteers. The food bank developed its "Produce for the People" program in 1995 to expand its collection and distribution of fresh produce from local farmers.

For several years, Barber Farms has been the food bank's largest farm donor. Last year alone, the farm's owners donated 76,079 pounds of assorted fresh produce. Barber Farms is a family-owned operation run by Cindy and Jim Barber and Jim's parents, J. Roger and Grace. The family farms 180 acres of mixed vegetables and also milks 110 cows.

Regional Food Bank Executive Director Mark Quandt said, "The Barbers have been great. They are very generous, and they have structured donating surplus and imperfect produce right into their sorting and packing process. It helps them, makes it easy for us, and results in quality produce for our member agencies. We love working with the Barbers and hope other farms follow their lead."

Cindy Barber said that the farm produces plenty of good quality produce that doesn't meet top standard and would otherwise go to waste if it weren't for the food bank. "Their efficient system for picking up and distributing produce makes it easy for us to donate. We're happy to help," she said.



Left to right: Jim Barber; Cindy Barber; Joel Berg, USDA's Coordinator of Community Food Security; Joann Dwyer, Assistant Executive Director, Regional Food Bank of New York; Grace Barber; and Roger Barber.
photo by Dawn Latham

Tom Della Rocco, CED in Albany County and USDA's Community Food Security Liaison for New York, said, "The Regional Food Bank has presented its annual achievement award for the last ten years, but this was the first year the honor has gone to a family farm." He added that the Barber family is not alone in New York in its food donation efforts. "FSA has developed a very strong food recovery program across the state." Since October 1998, over 4 million pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables have been

donated to various community groups. In New York, 15 FSA county offices are active in recovering food. Food from New York has been donated to pantries as far away as Florida, Virginia, and Oklahoma. Della Rocco said that FSA is working with representatives of City Harvest in New York City to improve food recovery in the metropolitan area.

FSA thanks the Barber family for their time and effort in reaching out to members of the community!

Children of the Corn?

Another New York farmer highly involved in food recovery is Malachi Farm owner Bob Whipple (third from right) from Knox, N.Y. In this instance, he gleaned sweet corn with help from AmeriCorps volunteers (left to right) Gary Pagan, Chippella Lewis, Charles Kimble, Dalmain Duncan, Matthew Clerico, and Alison Reilly. For more than 3 years, Tom Della Rocco, USDA's Community Food Security Liaison for New York, has worked to involve AmeriCorps volunteers in New York food gleaning efforts.



photo by Tom Della Rocco

A Story to Remember

by Daniel Robinson, SED, Alabama State Office

The last few years haven't been too kind to FSA in some respects, and the same can be said for the farmers. We are in a "farm crisis," as you all are aware. And what can we do? Well, we can give a sympathetic ear and some serious praying for the cause. We are too close to the situation — to FSA, the farmers, the producers, and the ranchers — to sit on the sidelines and be silent.

Both the Agency and the farmers' futures are being threatened. Farm programs as we know them are targeted by way of "Freedom to Farm" to become extinct by the year 2002. Census data on the loss of farms is frightening to those of us who know the importance of a strong farm economy. Nationwide, the number of farms has dropped approximately 14 percent since 1980, to 2.1 million today. And those farmers who keep farming are being asked to produce more in the face of rising production costs and decreasing commodity prices. Farmers want FSA to deliver more, but we are straining to survive also. FSA dodged the bullet last fiscal year by receiving supplemental funding and temporary staff increases, but each year brings new financial worries.

Although things have been difficult for the employees, with all the stress from work and the uncertainty, there is a beacon of hope. And even though the farm economy is at the crisis stage, we see a small glimmer trying to burst through the middle for the farmers and FSA. Both FSA and the farmers will find some way to shake off fears, step back up to the plate, and swing just as hard as before.

I'm reminded of a story I read from a speech given by a retired Brigadier General, centered on finding solutions and handling adversity, entitled, "Shake It Off and Step Up." The story goes:



Daniel Robinson, Alabama SED.
photo by Vickie Anthony

There was a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well, and the farmer heard his animal braying in distress. After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the old mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well were worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well.

Initially, the mule was hysterical! But, as the farmers shoveled and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck the mule.

He realized that every time a shovel-load of dirt landed on him, he should shake it off and step up! This he did, shovel after shovel. He shook it off and stepped up, shook it off and stepped up. He repeated this to himself to be encouraged no matter how painful the blows of dirt were or how distressing the situation seemed. The old mule fought panic and just kept on shaking it off and stepping up.

As you perhaps have already guessed, it wasn't long before the old mule — although battered and exhausted — stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well onto solid ground. So, what seemed like it would bury him actually was used for survival. For it was all due to the manner in which he handled adversity.

That's life! Isn't it? If we face our problems, respond to them positively, and refuse to give in, nor become bitter, there are potential benefits from adversities. We've all had dirt shoveled on us — FSA employees can't seem to do enough. The way we respond makes all the difference in the world. My message here should be clear: like that old mule, we have got to find a way to shake it off and step up.

FRUITCAKE FACTS

According to Rose Murray, a Canadian cook, fruitcakes taste better when they're created weeks before the holidays. They become moist and mellow and improve in flavor, especially for those aged in alcohol or even fruit juice. The cakes keep well for months, sometimes years, if stored properly. (You can bring out that one from 1976 now....)



Bright Future for a First-Time Farmer

by Monte Nevitt, Communications Coordinator, Arizona State Office

Kelley Berry is quite an easy-going young man, despite how busy he is. He's a full-time student at the University of Arizona and also runs a successful 120-acre cotton and wheat operation in Pinal County, Ariz. Berry's good working relationship with FSA has been one of the keys to his success.

Berry's summer employer, farmer Bill Starnbaugh, was the one who first encouraged him to go into farming for himself. Starnbaugh provided lots of help and leased equipment and sub-leased land to Berry. In that first year, Berry battled lack of financing, cold spring weather, and insects.

Unable to obtain funding elsewhere, in 1998 Berry met with Phil Neilson, FSA Farm Loan Manager in Tucson. Neilson spent hours helping Berry prepare an application and seeing him through the approval process for his beginning farmer loan. Then the headaches and real work began. While his classmates headed south of the border to Mexico's Gulf of California for the 1998 spring break, Berry headed west of town to his farm to spend 16-hour days irrigating and cultivating his cotton and wheat crops.

In June 1998, when his wheat matured, Berry began to see the payoff of his hard work. He harvested an impressive 3-plus tons per acre. His yields in 1998 were above county averages. When asked about that successful first year, Berry was cautiously optimistic. "Farming is a tough business, but I feel good knowing that FSA has confidence in me."

Shawneen Stevenson is a loan officer in the Pinal County Office who works closely with Berry. She stresses how she and Berry have developed trust and confidence in each other, a key element to a successful lender/borrower relationship. "Kelley follows through on what he proposes to do," she says.



Berry and FSA Loan Technician Shawneen Stevenson fill out loan paperwork for the 1999 crop year.

Berry and George Arredondo, Arizona SED, estimate the quality of Berry's cotton crop.

photos by Monte Nevitt

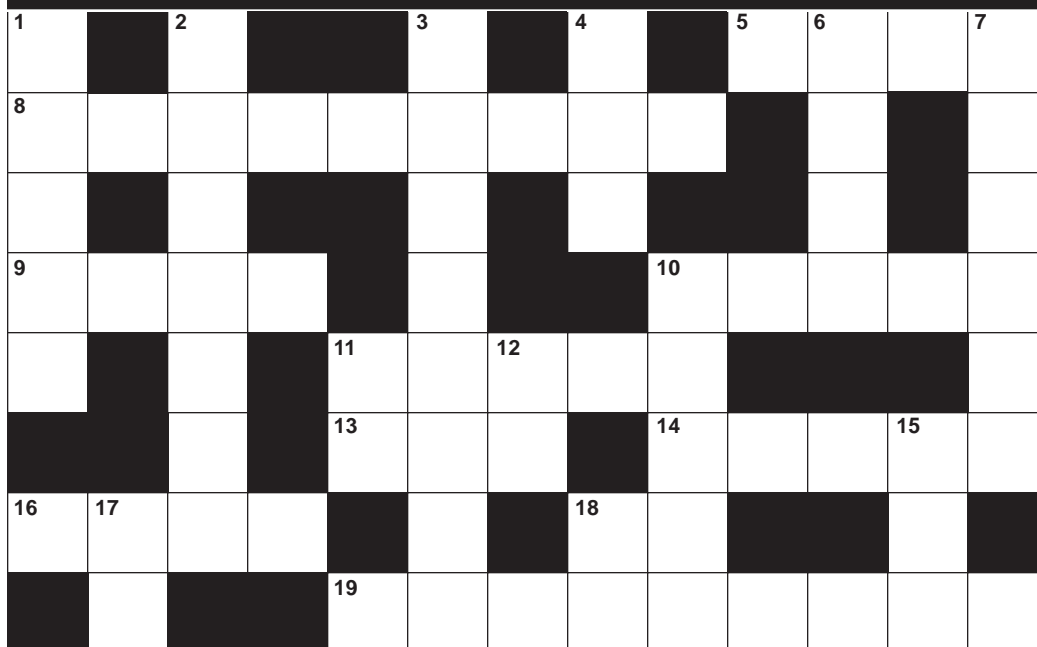


Berry, now in his second year of farming, has taken the next step in FSA financing. He has the added benefit of an unsupervised bank account. Stevenson continues to work closely with him to monitor his loan, but does not oversee day-to-day check writing. Stevenson says that a weakness common to many FSA borrowers is inconsistent recordkeeping. "Kelley holds himself to a strict accountability," she says. In fact, Phil Neilson says Berry is a very cooperative borrower and is right on schedule in repaying his loan. "He really makes supervised credit a joy," says Neilson.

Thanks to his discipline, Berry knows exactly where his budget stands. That, coupled with successful crop yields, makes for a positive outlook for him. Stevenson anticipates that within a couple of years, Berry will be fully up and running and ready for transition into the private lending sector.

Berry says he plans to maintain the current size of his operation until he graduates from college this spring. At that time, he will decide how much to expand his operation in order to farm full-time. Between his hard work and dedication and FSA's commitment to help him, Berry has a sound future in farming.

DECEMBER FSA CROSSWORD



ACROSS

5. ARS says that because of our country's increasing cultural diversity, this type of meat is becoming more popular in the marketplace
8. These trees are Vermont's fifth most lucrative commodity
9. Rudolph was the _____ of the litter
10. It might take more than the _____ man to rid your crops of pests
11. An herb of the parsley family similar to caraway seeds

DOWN

1. _____ squash
2. Tree _____ in the summer stimulates flower and fruit production, whereas in the winter it increases leaf and branch development
3. A topping for coffeecake, made of crumbs of blended sugar, cinnamon, flour, butter, and chopped nuts
4. Carrots are great cooked or this way
6. Pig sound
7. Number of CRP signups so far
10. Call the vet if you notice the _____ of illness in one of your farm animals
11. DACO Vicki Hi_k_
12. This state's FSA State Office is in Jackson, which is also the capitol
15. Horses, donkeys, and mules are _____
17. DAFLP C_rolyn C_oksie
18. This state's FSA State Office is in St. Paul, one of the twin cities

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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
November 29-December 3	San Diego, Calif.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, and Robert Springer, Executive Director for State Operations, to help conduct Farm Loan Program Training
December 1-5	Amarillo and Dallas, Texas	Larry Mitchell, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs, to speak at annual meeting of the Texas Wheat Producers Association and the Texas Wheat Producers Board
December 4-5	Chicago, Ill.	Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to attend Cotton Warehouse Association of America's Board of Directors Meeting
December 11-16	Dallas, Texas	Administrator Kelly, Larry Mitchell, and Robert Springer to attend the Five State Conference
December 25		Christmas Day
December 31		New Year's Eve
January 1		Happy New Year!

Note: The above is subject to change.